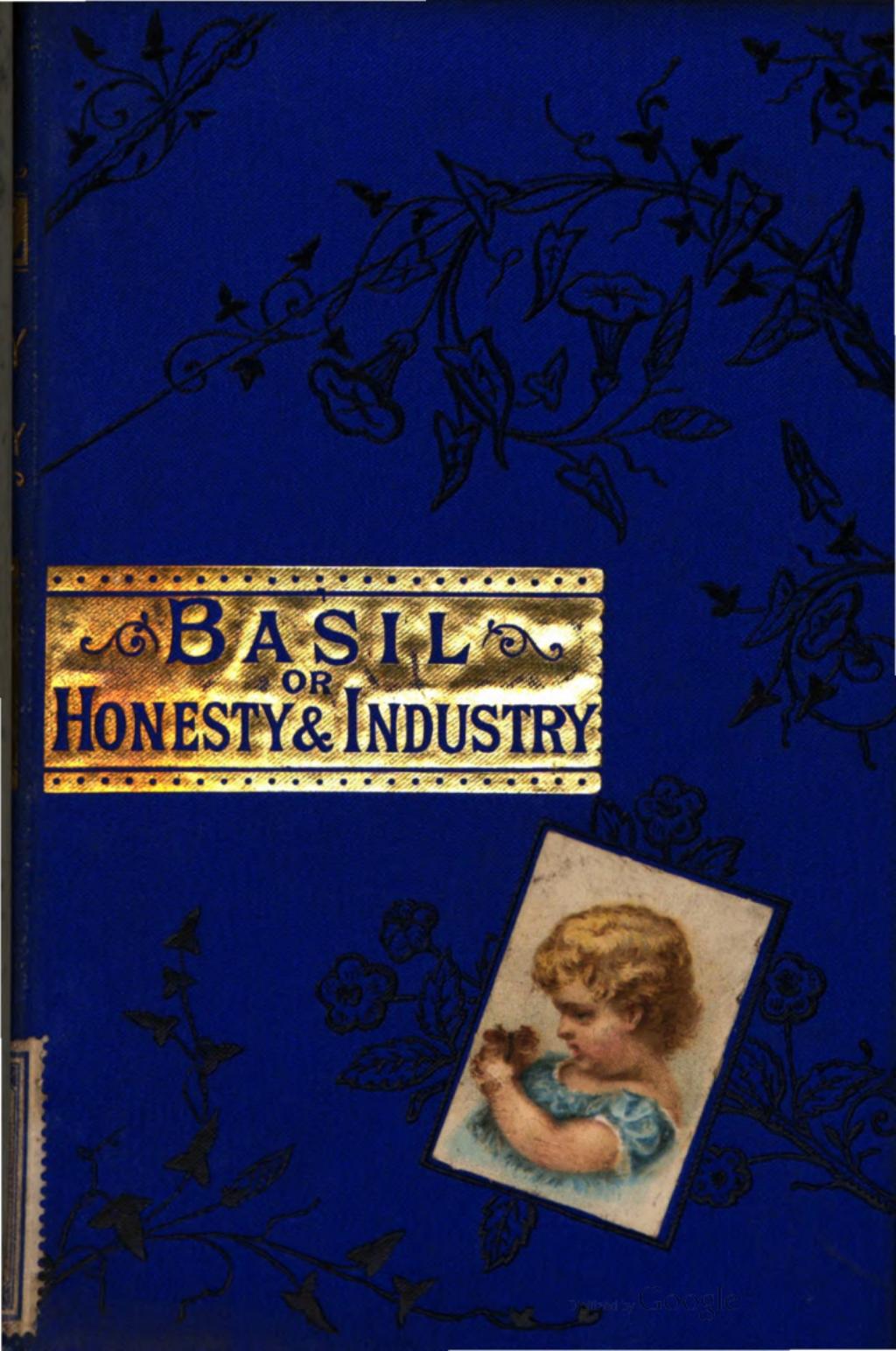

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BASIL
OR
HONESTY & INDUSTRY





THE FIRST MEETING.

[See page 8.]



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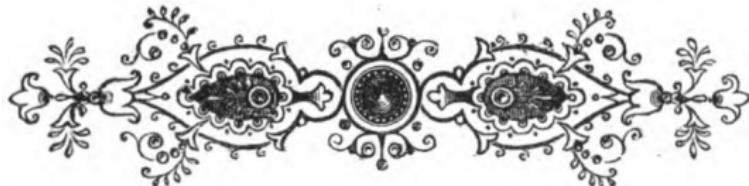
OR,

HONESTY AND INDUSTRY.



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BASIL;

OR,

HONESTY AND INDUSTRY.



CHAPTER I.

A MISERABLE HOME.

BI~~LL~~T was a lovely morning in autumn, when two gentlemen rode across a pleasant village green. A flock of geese were marching along on their return from a visit to a neighbouring stubble field, whilst on another part of the green a party of boys were playing at bat and ball. The gentlemen stopped at a gate leading to a large farm which had recently been sold, although the house was still uninhabited.

“It is very unlikely we shall find any one up at the house to look after our horses,” said one of the gentlemen; “and I think it would be better to secure the services of one of those lads yonder.”

The elder of the two gentlemen dismounted as he spoke, and called out to the group of bat-and-ball players—

“Here, one of you lads, just hold these horses for a while.”

A very poorly-clad but intelligent-looking boy was the first to answer the summons. His ragged garments hung loosely upon him, and he had that prematurely old look about his face which want and privation never fail to produce.

“I'll hold them for you, please, sir.”

“That's a good boy ; and walk them quietly up and down, for they are rather warm.”

The two gentlemen entered the farm ; and Basil—for that was the boy's name—did as he was bid, walking the horses up and down on the smooth green turf. He was fond of animals, and seemed quite proud of his charge as he stopped every now and then to stroke and pat their glossy necks.

“What a fine thing it must be to have a horse of one's own,” thought he. “I'd rather have a horse than be a king, that I would ;” and he stooped down to gather a bunch of sweet clover, which he divided between the two animals.

It was nearly half an hour before the gentlemen reappeared, for they had been into the wood at the back of the house to inspect some trees which were to be felled shortly. Basil led the horses to the gate to be in readiness for them.

As the gentlemen approached, the elder of the two said to his companion, “I sincerely wish you joy of your new farm, Stewart, and I have no doubt but that you will prosper in it. Perseverance and industry are the two great essentials to success, and

I believe I am not wrong in attributing to you both these qualities."

"Thank you for your good opinion," said the other, smiling ; and he then added in a more serious tone, "I am, after all, you know, but a steward of this great property. May He who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men enable me to discharge my duties properly. So large an estate entails a great responsibility upon its possessor."

"Most assuredly it does," replied his companion ; "but if we conscientiously endeavour to do our duty, it is a proud responsibility, inasmuch as it gives us the power of doing an immensity of good to our fellow-creatures. And as regards industry and perseverance, I believe that the benevolent Creator blesses all such exertions when directed to the right end. Thirty-five years ago I was as poor and penniless as that boy there," pointing to Basil as he spoke.

"And now you are as rich as Croesus," said his friend, smiling.

"Not quite, nor should I wish to be. I have sufficient to lend a helping hand to my fellow-creatures, and to live comfortably myself : what more can I require ? God has prospered me in all my undertakings, and I should indeed be sadly ungrateful for His goodness were I ever to forget that there was once a time, the memory of which is very strong, when I should have been thankful to earn a trifle as this boy is now doing. It's all quite true, my lad," continued he, as he caught Basil's eye fixed on him in incredulous astonishment ; "it's all quite true, Ask God to give you His Holy

Spirit to enable you to act *honestly* and *industriously* in whatever station you may be placed ; and there is no reason why, with His blessing on your exertions—and He will bless you if you ask Him—you should not be an independent man some of these days."

Thus saying, he put sixpence into Basil's hand, and the two friends mounted their horses and rode off.

Basil stood gazing earnestly after them as they departed. The words he had just heard still rang in his ears :—" There is no reason why you should not some day be an independent man." Basil scarcely knew the exact meaning of the word "independent," but he supposed it meant having plenty to eat and drink, wearing good clothes, and living in a fine house ; and as his life had hitherto been passed in the greatest poverty and privation it is needless to say how improbable such a future appeared to him.

" Can it ever be ? " thought he to himself. " I'll try, at all events ; " and without rejoining his companions, he turned away towards his father's cottage which stood at one end of the village green. There, appearances were certainly against poor Basil. Cleanliness and neatness is, generally speaking, the rule amongst the cottage homes of England ; and the comfortable English cottages dotted over the fertile plains, or nestling snugly amidst the fruitful orchards of our valleys, form one of the most attractive portions in a rural landscape ; but there are exceptions, and Basil's home unfortunately was one of them.

There was a good-sized piece of garden ground in

front of the cottage, but it was full of nothing but weeds. There was no gate; that useful article had come off its hinges long since, and for the want of being mended had lain about, until at last it was used for firewood. The windows could boast of scarcely one whole pane of glass, and were stuffed up with paper and rags, which, whilst partially excluding the air, effectually shut out the light of day. We need scarcely add that the internal arrangements of the cottage entirely corresponded with the description now given of the outside. The floor looked as if it had never made the acquaintance of a broom; and the only furniture consisted of a very dirty deal table, and two or three ricketty chairs. An untidy-looking, sickly woman was feeding a half-starved looking baby out of a broken tea-cup: and three or four other children, the very pictures of dirt and uncleanliness, were quarrelling together on the floor of the cottage.

Such was Basil's home—a bad foundation, you will say, for a life of industry and independence. And yet it is strange what effect a few words will sometimes produce. Basil had seldom, until that afternoon, heard the accents of hope or encouragement. His father spent the greater part of his time and his money at the alehouse, and his mother in gossiping amongst her neighbours and railing at her husband, whom report said she had, in the first instance, helped to drive from his home by the little attention she paid to his comfort. What with the father's unsteady habits, and the mother's want of thriftiness, you may be sure there were many days when the children had little or nothing to eat. This was very bad even for the younger ones, but

the elder children, and Basil particularly; who was nearly thirteen years old, suffered very much in health from such scanty fare, and was so stunted in his growth, that he did not look to be more than ten or eleven at the utmost. It was utterly impossible there could be the fear of God in such a household. Most truly has the psalmist said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ;” and where there was such evident disregard of God and His commandments, there could be none of that holy fear the effect of which is to enable men to depart from evil.

Basil’s parents seldom went to the house of God, and cared little about their children doing so. The elder ones sometimes attended the Sunday-school, which was more than a mile distant ; and Basil, who was a quick boy, had learned to read tolerably well ; but this was all.

“ What did Squire Hamilton give you for holding his horse, Basil ? ” said his mother, as he entered the cottage.

“ Sixpence, mother.”

“ Off with you, then, to the shop, and buy a loaf for your suppers, for I have nothing to give you.”

Basil was not long in executing his mother’s orders ; and for once the children had a hearty meal.

“ Was that Squire Hamilton, then, whose horse I held, mother ? ”

“ To be sure it was.”

“ Do you mean he who lives in the great house on the hill near the church ? ”

“ Who else should I mean ; and what is it to you where he lives ? ”

"Why, he told me he was once just as poor as I am, mother!"

"Ah! it's all very fine for rich people like him to be talking in that way: he was making fun of you, Basil, and you were foolish enough to believe him."

"I'm sure he was in earnest," replied Basil: "and he told me that if I tried to do my duty, and prayed to God to help me, I might be rich myself some day."

"Nonsense, Basil," said his mother; "all I know is that I find it hard to get bare food for you all, let alone growing rich."

Basil was silent for a few moments, and then he said—

"But did you ever pray to God to help you, mother?"

"I've never had time to think about religion, Basil: but don't begin preaching to me, go and nurse your little sister."

The boy did as he was told, and soon got the child to sleep. Long after it was sleeping, Basil still sat on the low chair rocking it to and fro. His thoughts were far away. Mr. Hamilton had told him what to do: and what was it? Not to pray to God to make him rich, but to enable him to act honestly and industriously. This, then, was the way to become independent. It was not surprising that a boy brought up as Basil had been should find some difficulty in reconciling this advice with his own experience of life. Of industry he had certainly not seen many examples; and if he had not actually been taught to be dishonest, it was as much as we could say. So far for his home teaching. But

Basil had, as we have already said, attended the Sunday-school from time to time ; and although a most irregular pupil, so much so as to preclude any great interest being taken in him, still some good seed had been sown in his heart, and this was destined by Almighty God to bear fruit after many days.

Let no sabbath-school teacher feel discouraged or disheartened at not reaping an immediate result from the good seed sown by them with prayer and faith ; it may be dormant for many years, but the germ still remains, and often, when least expected, will spring up and bear fruit under the quickening influences of God's Holy Spirit. Numerous are the cases where the young are led to Christ while on the forms of Sunday-schools. Basil felt as if there was some sort of link between Mr. Hamilton's advice and the teaching he had experienced at the Sunday-school ; and the result of his reflecting on the subject was that he determined to return to school the following sabbath. This was a step in the right direction.

"Now, Basil, don't sit dreaming there all the evening," said his mother, who had been putting the other children to bed. "Go and lay that child down, and then off to bed with you. You must get up early in the morning, and bring in some fire-wood ; we haven't a bit in the house. We shall have to get as much as we can before the new folks come to the farm, for there will not be much to be had then, I reckon."

The Woodside Farm estate, which had been so recently purchased by Mr. Stewart, had been un-

tenanted for many years previously. Some serious disputes having arisen as to the legal ownership of the property, the whole estate had been thrown into Chancery. As some of our young readers may not quite understand what this means, we will try to make it plain to them.

The Court of Chancery is the highest court of justice in the kingdom, next to the parliament, and is presided over by the Lord Chancellor, who is the highest officer of the crown. This court had its origin in the desire to render justice complete, and to decide cases for which there was no relief in the common law courts.

To such little boys as learn Latin, it may be interesting for them to know the origin or meaning of the word *chancery*. It is a very old name, dating so far back as the time of the Romans. The chief notary or scribe of the Roman emperors was called, in Latin, *cancellarius*, whence our English word chancellor, because his principal duty was to *cross out*, or *cancel*, any expressions in the edicts of the prince which he thought objectionable, and also because he sat within *lattice-work*, or *cancelli*, which were erected in the chancery hall to protect the emperor from the crowding of the people when he sat in judgment.

During many years the fine woods and plantations of Woodside Farm had been allowed almost to run wild ; and great depredations had been committed by the peasantry of the neighbourhood, many of whom heard with regret that the property was at last sold, as they felt they would no longer be able to continue their dishonest practices

of breaking down the wood fences, and even seriously injuring many valuable trees.

Basil's father called him next morning almost as soon as it was light, and bade him "look alive," and be off to the woods as soon as he could. Hitherto the boy had done as he was desired without a compunctionous feeling or thought that he was doing wrong, but now everything seemed in a different light; and as he recalled his mother's words the previous evening—that they must get what they could "before the new folk came"—the idea first dawned upon his mind that he would be acting dishonestly in robbing the woods without permission. He was terribly afraid of his father, who was a man of very violent temper; but he summoned up courage to say, "Perhaps Mr. Stewart may not like any one to take wood now that he has bought the farm, father."

"Like it! of course he won't; but we're not going to be such fools as to ask him."

"But is it right, father?"

"Get along about your business, and don't be giving me any of your nonsense, Basil," cried his father, in a passionate tone of voice: "do as I bid you, or I'll make you remember it, I promise you."

Basil knew his father too well to dare to remonstrate further at present; so having dressed himself, and eaten the morsel of dry bread which was his share of the remains of the loaf, he left his home before the bright sun had risen above the tall trees of Woodside Farm.

There is a sweet and soothing influence in the breath of the early morning air; and as Basil walked slowly along, his mind became calm, and

his path of duty stood out clearly before him. Mr. Hamilton had expressly said he was to be *honest*.

Basil knew that to be honest meant that he ought not to take anything belonging to another without his express permission, and that he was to be truthful in word as well as deed. But had Mr. Hamilton told him the way to become honest? Yes; he had counselled him to pray to God to make him so. Poor Basil had no power in himself to become an honest boy; that great change could only be effected by the working of God's Holy Spirit in his sinful heart. But he could pray to God, and ask Him to give him His grace and enable him to do what was right. And as these thoughts passed through his mind, Basil knelt down in the quiet stubble field through which he was passing, and in his own feeble language besought the Giver of all good things to guide his steps aright, and to enable him to act honestly.

CHAPTER II.

BASIL FINDS A FRIEND.

WHEN Basil arose from his knees the sun had just risen above the dark woods, and was flooding the sky with a soft rosy light. The glorious rays seemed to penetrate into the boy's heart and speak words of peace and encouragement to him. It seemed to tell him that the great and

merciful God, the Creator of this beautiful world, who “hateth nothing that He has made,” and without whose permission “not even a sparrow falleth to the ground,” would lend a gracious ear to the prayer, weak and imperfect as it was, of an ignorant and sinful little boy ; and would, for His Son Jesus Christ’s sake, answer it in His own good time.

I do not mean to say that Basil thought exactly all I have just written. He was an ignorant boy, and would have been sadly puzzled to put his thoughts into words ; but the substance was the same, and there was a bright and hopeful expression on his face that spoke more than words could have done. And yet he scarcely knew what to do. He was sure of a good beating if he failed to take home sufficient wood, and the morning air had already made him feel terribly hungry. What should he do ? One thing he made up his mind to, and that was that nothing should induce him to steal. So on he walked ; and as he entered the wood the dry leaves and twigs crackled under his feet. A pretty brown squirrel was sitting on one of the lower boughs of a large tree, eating a ripe nut. Basil’s attention was attracted by the animal ; and, casting his eyes on the ground beneath the tree on which the squirrel was sitting, he saw a number of sweet chestnuts lying on the ground quite ripe. Here was a breakfast all ready for poor Basil. Chestnuts are very nice and wholesome ; and in Spain and Portugal, and other countries in the south of Europe, they form the principal food of the peasants, who either roast or boil them, or grind them into flour, of which they make a sort of cake.

Basil had no fire by which to roast his chestnuts, so he was obliged to eat them raw ; but hunger is an excellent sauce, so he enjoyed them very much ; and as there were more than he could eat at the time, he put the remainder in his pockets. Then on he went again, with scarcely any fixed purpose, until the sharp ringing sound of a woodman's axe struck upon his ear. It was long since such a sound had been heard in those woods, and Basil hastened forwards towards the spot whence the noise proceeded. As he walked along, he noticed that a number of the trees which he passed had a white or red mark on their trunks, and he then remembered to have heard that a great deal of the timber at Woodside had been sold, and was shortly to be cut down. At length he came to a spot rather more open than other parts of the wood, and saw three men busily occupied in felling a huge oak tree. Basil knew the tree well ; it was one of the finest in the wood ; he had frequently gathered its acorns, and now he almost felt sorry as he saw this "mighty monarch of the forest" sinking beneath the axe of the woodman.

"Stand out of the way, youngster," cried one of the men in a loud voice, as a large bough fell with a crash close to Basil's feet. He started back affrighted.

"All right, my lad, no bones broken this time," said he who appeared to be the elder of the party, and was better dressed than the others ; "only don't get in the way of a falling branch again."

"I'll take care another time," said Basil.

"And what brings you here at this time of the morning, lad ?"

"I was passing through the wood, and I heard the sound of the axe ; and I had never seen a tree cut down, and if you wouldn't mind my staying and looking on a bit, I——"

"Not at all, lad, not at all," continued the same man who had first spoken, and who had a strong Scotch accent : "but have you no work to do ? it's a bad thing for young lads o' the like o' you to be a sauntering about all the day. I have bairns of my own in Scotland, and the first thing I try to teach them is, that—

'Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.'

May be you've heard these lines before ?"

"Yes, sir, I learned them once at the Sunday-school ; but, indeed, I have no work to do, or——"

"You mean you'd do it. Well, there's no time like the present ; what if I give you some work to-day ?"

"I should be so very glad," said Basil ; and there was no mistaking the tone of his voice, or the look of his face.

"All right, then. Can you use the axe at all ? I suppose not."

"I can a little," said Basil.

"Very well ; take this light one, and let me see you try to cut off the small branches from the great bough that has just fallen."

Basil did as he was told, and succeeded tolerably well, although his strokes were very weak.

"Not much strength in your wrists yet," said his new friend, smiling ; and then, remarking Basil's



THROUGH THE WOOD.

pale and thin face, he said in a rough, kind tone, "Have you breakfasted, laddie?"

"I had a small piece of bread before I left home, and I found some chestnuts in the wood."

"We'll give you something better than that," said the kind woodman; "and I'm thinking, Stenie," continued he, addressing himself to one of his companions, "that it's about time we had some breakfast ourselves. This lad might save us time by going down to the farm, and bringing us up the can of milk that was promised us. Do you know your way to Woodside Farm, youngster?"

"Oh, yes," said Basil, eagerly; "I know every 'blind path'* in the wood, and I'll be there and back again almost before you miss me."

"You'll make a man, some day," said the woodman, who was evidently pleased at Basil's alacrity.

"Shall I go at once, sir?"

"Yes; and say you came from Donald McNicoll; you'll find one of our party there; and we shall be glad of your help, as we only came last night, and don't know any of your short cuts."

Basil set off like a young deer. Through brushwood and brier, through the tall masses of brake fern; now startling a timid hare from his bed in the long grass, and now a covey of partridges who rose on "whirring wing." On he went at a very different pace to that with which he had entered the wood; and in a short space of time he reached Woodside Farm. Mr. Stewart, who had purchased

* A "blind path" is a name given by country people to a slight track through a wood or over a heath. Such tracks are frequently only known to a few.

the farm, was a Scotch gentleman, and it was his steward, Donald McNicoll, and some of his men, whom Basil had met in the wood. They had only arrived the previous evening; but Donald had frequently visited the estate on former occasions in company with his master, and had, under his direction, marked what trees were to be felled.

Basil got the can of milk and started on his return to the wood. As he was leaving the farm he saw the son of a near neighbour crossing a field at a little distance. He called out to him, and asked him to look in at his mother's cottage when he went home to dinner, and tell her not to be uneasy if she did not see him till evening. Basil was a kind-hearted boy and did not wish to cause her any anxiety.

Back again, through the long fern and the brush-wood—not quite so quickly this time, though, for he must carry the can of milk steadily. When he reached the oak tree the men were busy preparing breakfast. "Well done, my man," cried Donald; "just in time to see a highland breakfast made, and to have a share in it, too."

Everything was quite new to Basil. The wood-men had kindled a fire on the ground of dry sticks, and over it was a small iron skillet, or pot, full of water, which was just boiling. Donald McNicoll now opened a bag of oatmeal, and threw a quantity of it into the boiling water, stirring it all the time with a wooden spoon. The mixture soon began to thicken, and was then poured out into small wooden bowls, where it looked like thick gruel. In a few seconds a dry skin settles on the top of the

porridge, as it is called, and it is then ready to be eaten.

The men sat down on two of the large boughs of the oak tree, which had been cut off, and Donald McNicoll simply and fervently asked a blessing on the meal of which they were about to partake. A portion of the milk which Basil had brought was then poured into each bowl, and breakfast commenced. There was no bowl for Basil, so he had to wait until one of the men had finished ; but his porridge was keeping hot all the time in the skillet, and Donald talked so pleasantly to him, that he did not mind waiting. His new friend asked him several questions about his home and his family, not out of mere curiosity, but with a true kindly feeling, and he was soon enabled to form a pretty correct opinion as to Basil's previous education. Donald himself was no great scholar, but being naturally of a shrewd, clever disposition, he had acquired a vast deal of useful information, and what was better than all, he was a sincere and humble believer in Christ. A true lover of nature, he saw and acknowledged the finger of the Almighty in all His works, and felt the full force of those beautiful lines—

“ There's not a plant nor flower that grows
But makes Thy glory known.”

Short as was the time spent over breakfast Donald found ample opportunity of leading Basil's mind from the works of God to God Himself, and all was done in such a kind and winning way that gave his words double power.

"Now, my lad," said he to Basil, as Stenie finished his porridge, "there's a bowl for you, and you'll make the acquaintance of a new friend, I guess." Stenie poured the porridge into the bowl for him, and gave him some milk, and Basil had a thoroughly satisfying breakfast. The country people in Scotland almost live on this oatmeal porridge, which there supplies the place of wheaten bread. It is considered very nutritious and wholesome, especially for children.

When Basil had finished breakfast, Donald again set him to work to chop off some of the small branches. Basil worked on steadily, although it made his wrists ache sadly. Meantime the woodmen had been busy preparing for the falling of the main stem or trunk of the huge oak. A strong rope was fastened to the topmost part of the tree; and when, after long and repeated blows of the axe, the great trunk was nearly severed, the men pulled with all their might at the long rope, and after great exertion, crack ! crack ! crack ! was heard, each crack louder than the first, until with a loud and final crash the stem gave way, and the huge trunk fell to the ground. Then Donald and his men commenced barking the trunk and branches. This was quite a novelty to Basil, and Donald kindly explained the whole process to him.

By the bark of a tree is meant the outer covering of the stem; and the bark of many trees is most useful, because it contains a substance called tannic acid, which is used to convert raw hides, or skins of animals, into leather such as shoes are made of. The bark of many trees produce this acid, but in Britain it is the oak bark which is most esteemed.

The bark of the birch tree is greatly used for steeping fishermen's nets and cordage, to preserve them from rotting ; and it is by reason of their being so tanned, as it is called, that they acquire that reddish-brown colour which doubtless many of my young readers have noticed, and which makes a fishing-net so picturesque an object in many a seaside landscape. But we must return to the process of barking, which Basil now witnessed for the first time. The rough outside parts of the bark are lifeless and useless, and are first removed by an instrument called a scraper. The smaller branches of the tree are then cut into lengths of about two feet, and the bark is loosened by beating with a mallet, or wooden hammer, after which it comes off quite easily. Basil was soon able to bark some of these small branches. The main trunk and large branches are not so easily stripped of their bark. The bark has first to be cut through by a sort of huge chisel, which is called a barking-iron, into similar lengths, each of which is also divided lengthways, and it is then finally stripped off by means of mallets and chisels. Great care is requisite in drying the bark, as it would be quite spoiled if allowed to get mouldy, and is liable to suffer injury if too much exposed to the sun. It is therefore generally stacked very carefully against the trunks of trees in such a way as to allow a free circulation of air. Oak bark will frequently fetch from £6 to £8 a ton.

Donald was pleased with the evident interest Basil took in all he saw and heard. "It's a braw*" world, Basil, laddie, and the longer one lives in it,

* Beautiful.

the more and more our hearts should glow in praise and gratitude to the Maker of it. It's a great blessing, I always think, to have one's lot cast in the pure, fresh country air, with all the numberless tokens of His marvellous love about us, beneath us, around us. Not but that He is equally present in the crowded city as in this lonely wood ; but it has always seemed to me as if we were closer to Him in scenes like these. Hast ever thought, laddie, if God has so clothed the grass of the field, so filled with objects of beauty the dwelling-place of sinners, how much more will He adorn the heavenly mansions which He has prepared for them that love Him ? If the earth, which is only His footstool, be so beautiful, what will His throne be ? ”

Basil had thought but little on the subject hitherto, and he honestly told his new friend so.

“ It's time to begin then, Basil. ‘ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,’ and you cannot reckon on the future. How few of all these acorns will ever become great trees ! And many a lad younger than thou art has been suddenly called to his great account with all his sins unrepented of. Begin from this moment, lad ; and may God give you grace to keep in the right way. There be many ‘ blind paths ’ in religion, Basil, but don't you follow them. There is but one safe and sure road, and our blessed Saviour has told us which that is. What does He say ? ‘ I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.’ Believe in Him, and you shall be saved.”

The tears were in Basil's eyes as he pressed the hand of his kind friend. The boy's heart was too

full for words ; and, indeed, he would have found difficulty in expressing all he wished to say. But in his heart he felt how signally God had answered his morning prayer. Donald perfectly understood the boy's emotion. "We'll may be have another chat, Basil, before you leave this evening," he said, as, dinner being over, they returned to their work.



CHAPTER III.

A PLEASANT EVENING.

THE sun was sinking amid golden clouds which gave promise of a glorious morrow, when Donald McNicoll told Basil that his day's work was finished, and that he might have some supper, and then see about going home. Again the fire was kindled, and the bowls of smoking porridge distributed ; and then it was that Donald fulfilled his promise of having another chat with Basil. The two men had finished their suppers, and gone back to the farm ; but Donald lingered behind whilst Basil ate his porridge.

"I'll gi'e you fourpence, lad, for your day's work," said he ; "and any time you like to come and lend a hand here, I'll do the same for you, and you can take your meals with us, as you have done to-day."

"Thank you very much, sir ; but would you mind giving me some of those small boughs off which the bark has been stripped ; I'd rather have

them than money, indeed I would," said Basil, earnestly.

" You're a strange lad," said Donald ; " why, of what use will the wood be to you ? "

" Mother has none at home, sir, and she told me this morning to be sure and—and——," and here Basil stopped confused, for he saw the woodman's keen eye fixed gravely upon him.

" I hope you're not one of those people who have been robbing these woods lately, and destroying these fences, lad," said he, in a stern voice ; and then, remarking the great distress depicted on Basil's countenance, he added in a somewhat softened voice, " It's early days, laddie, to become a thief ; and I cannot think your heart is quite hardened. Oh pray to God to enable you to repent, and to lead an honest life for the future. I have a young son of your age at home, and dearly as I love him, I'd rather never see him again on earth than that he should commit such a great sin."

Donald paused, and brushed away the tears from his eyes ; and Basil began to speak, at first hesitatingly and timidly, but gathering courage and confidence as he went on.

" I have been a very bad boy, sir, I know it ; but indeed I have never broken down any fences, and I have never been in the woods to gather sticks since I knew the farm was sold."

" But how about to-day, lad ? Be careful ; add not falsehood to dishonesty."

" Father told me this morning early I was to go out and get some wood, or he'd make me remember it ; and I left home, not daring to disobey him by staying in : but I made up my mind I wouldn't

steal any, and I prayed to God in the field yonder to make me honest ; and very soon after I had prayed I heard the sound of your axe, and I came up as you know, sir, just as the big bough was falling ; and when you asked me if I was willing to do some work I felt as if God had answered my prayer and sent you to help me ; and this is the real truth, indeed, sir ; only I don't think I should have prayed to God to-day if it hadn't been for Squire Hamilton's advice. He was with Mr. Stewart yesterday, and I held their horses for them ; and Squire Hamilton told me to pray to God to make me honest and industrious, and that was the way to get on in the world."

"He was right, Basil," said the woodman, who was moved by the boy's simple story. "He was right so far, that dishonesty and idleness never did and never can prosper, for they go right against God's commandments. But you mustn't try to act honestly merely for the sake of getting on in the world. God looks at the motive of all our actions ; and though man cannot see into the heart of man, God can read our inmost thoughts, and if it be a purely worldly motive that makes us live honestly, it will be utterly worthless in the sight of God, nay more, it will be in itself a great sin. And again, if you seek by living honestly and industriously to find favour with God, you are equally in the wrong. No man ever was or can be saved by his own merit, how great soever he may think it. It is not your tears, your prayers, your confessions, your duties ; *nothing*, in fact, that you can do will make God forgive and accept you. It is the blood of Christ that is the ground of His forgiveness ; the righteousness

of Christ that justifies. All your works, until you believe in Jesus Christ, are dead works, and dead works never yet took a soul to heaven. It's a dangerous thing too, Basil, lad, to think too much about gaining earthly riches and honour. In many cases, when they are obtained, they prove great snares to those who possess them. What does our blessed Saviour Himself say? ‘Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.’ And we shall then be in a frame of mind which will enable us to set a right value on earthly riches, and the first importance of laying up for ourselves lasting treasure in heaven. I believe you have told me the truth, Basil, and you may have as much of the wood as you can carry ; and may God, in His infinite mercy, keep you out of temptation for the future.” As he spoke he laid his hand kindly on Basil’s head, and the boy, falling on his knees at the woodman’s feet, sobbed aloud.

“ You are so kind, so very kind,” said he, in a broken voice.

“ Nay, laddie, haven’t I bairns of my ain, as I said before ? and wouldn’t I thank any one who would be after giving them a little advice in the hour of temptation ? ”

All Basil’s reserve melted away under the genial influence of Donald’s kindness ; and he told him all his childish griefs and troubles ; and about his little sister Annie, who was a cripple, and who could never run and play about like other children.

“ Was it wrong to wish to be rich for Annie’s sake ? ” said Basil : “ you don’t know how weak and ill she is sometimes ; and very often we have scarcely enough to eat ; and I often think, if I

could only be a rich man, what nice things I would get for her, and how she should have a little carriage to ride in, and—oh, sir, was all this wrong?" cried the boy, earnestly.

"No, no, Basil; God forbid that I should say so. God himself has sent us those family ties to call out our affections, and to prevent us from becoming selfish by thinking only of ourselves; and so long as we do not love our earthly friends more than our heavenly One, we are fulfilling His will by showing them affection and kindness. It was not wrong in you to wish to provide comforts for your poor little sister."

"Thank you for saying so," said Basil. "I do love her very, very dearly, and she loves me also; she has no one but me to do anything for her, for mother has the baby to look after; and in the spring I used to carry Annie in my arms to some fields near us, where she could sit on the grass and gather primroses, and she was so happy, and so was I to see her so."

"How old is your little sister?"

"She was seven years old last birthday. Mother took her a month ago to stay with our aunt who lives at the seaside, in the hopes that the sea air and bathing might do her good. Mother is going to-morrow to fetch her home again, so I shall not be able to come to work any more this week; for mother will be gone two days, and I must stay and take care of baby. Giles, the carrier, has offered mother a seat in his cart; he goes to West Bay one day, and comes back the next."

"Well, come when you can; I shall always be glad to see you. I am glad you make yourself useful at

home. Take your wood and be off now, for it is getting late, and here's the fourpence as well, it may buy a trifle for your sick sister."

Donald himself helped Basil to make up his bundle of wood, and gave him a good thick piece of cord to tie it together with. It was quite a large faggot.

"Are you sure you can carry it all?" asked the woodman.

"Never fear," said Basil, with a happy smile.

"Good evening, and God bless you, lad; don't forget what I have been saying to you;" and so Donald and Basil parted, the one taking the way to the farm, and the other towards his father's cottage.

They had scarcely parted company more than a minute, when Basil heard his friend calling after him: "Hallo there, lad, one word more. Do you go to the Sunday-school."

"Sometimes, but not always," answered Basil; "but I mean to go next Sunday."

"That's right, lad, and try and be regular in future."

"I hope to do so; good night, sir, and thank you."

And Basil proceeded homewards. His was a heavy load; but when the heart is light, it is wonderful what the body can support. Basil tripped along scarcely conscious of his burden. When he came within sight of his home, he saw several of his little brothers playing in the bit of ground in front of the cottage. One of them caught sight of him, and uttered a loud shout. "Here's our Basil coming with a great stack of wood at his back," cried

Willie, a ragged, dirty little urchin of six years old. "Hurrah ! hurrah ! now we shall have a good fire."

The other little ones began to shout also, and ran towards the cottage, so that by the time Basil reached the spot his mother had come to the door to see what all the noise was about.

"Well, Basil, you have got a load. I hope none of the farm people saw you coming along ; it was rather venturesome of you to bring such a bundle by daylight, you might have brought it home by degrees."

Basil set down the faggot at the cottage door, and stopped to take breath.

"It is our own, our very own, mother : it was given to me, every bit ; and I have got fourpence besides," cried he, rattling the pence in his pocket. "I prayed to God to keep me from stealing, and he sent a kind friend to help me ;" and in a few words Basil told his mother all the adventures of the day.

"You are a lucky boy, Basil ; and I can't say but what I am glad you didn't steal the wood. I was quite uneasy about you all day long, when I found you didn't return, for fear you should have got into some scrape ; and it would have been our fault and not yours if you had, for you went sadly against your will this morning. I made up my mind I'd never ask you to steal again if you came home safe ; and just after that Jem Price brought me your message, he hadn't been able to come before."

"Dear mother," said Basil, "dear mother, and will you keep your promise, and never ask me to go to the wood again without permission ?"

"I won't go back from my word," said his mother.

"God bless you mother for saying so, and I somehow feel as if brighter days would come soon. I am almost sure I shall get regular work in the woods, and if father would only—"

At this moment his father's step was heard coming up to the door.

"What do you leave all that wood against the door for?" he said, angrily, as he entered the cottage; "do you want all the neighbourhood to see it?"

"It's our own, it's not stolen, father," said Basil.

"What does the boy mean?"

Then the whole story had to be repeated over again, and Jacob Greene — that was the name of Basil's father — was evidently a little moved by it.

For once he had come home sober. He had been working at some copses quite in another direction to the village alehouse, and had come home straight from his work. We will not undertake to say that he had not intended visiting the "Half Moon" at a late hour in the evening, but God had ordered it otherwise.

"I'm glad it so happened, Basil," he said; "you'll stand a good chance of being hired up at the farm next week: they tell me Mr. Stewart is going to engage a number of the village boys. I'm glad you didn't steal the wood (Jacob Greene forgot that if Basil had followed his orders he would have done so); I don't want my children to grow up thieves no more than other people; but when a man's so poor, what can he do?" (A bad excuse, Jacob Greene, far

worse than none at all.) "Here, wife," cried he, throwing her half-a-crown, "you'll be wanting a trifle for your journey to-morrow."

Whether Jacob thought by this act of generosity to atone for his conduct to Basil that morning, I know not; his wife felt the tears coming into her eyes at this unwonted kindness.

"Thank you, Jacob, I shall indeed be glad of it."

"And, father, I'm so glad you're come home early," said Basil; "I've got my pocket full of sweet chestnuts, and there is some of the wood in the faggot quite dry, so we can have a fire and roast them. They're just good, I can tell you, when roasted and eaten with a little salt."

Jacob could not for shame leave his cottage again that evening. Basil went to the shop, and brought in a loaf and a quarter of a pound of dripping; a good fire was made of the dry wood and some furze that Jacob had brought home, and the chestnuts were certainly excellent when roasted in the hot wood ashes.

It had been many a long day since Jacob had spent such an evening with his family. He was fond of his children, too, when he was sober; and as that happened to be the case at present, he danced the little ones on his knees, played with the baby, and made Basil tell over and over again about his seeing the little brown squirrel eating nuts, and how, through that incident, he came to look on the ground and find the nice sweet chestnuts.

Poor Mrs. Greene felt happier than she had for years, and Basil could not help contrasting in his

own mind the different feelings they would all have experienced had the wood been really stolen. It was the fact of its having been got honestly that made all their hearts so light. There was no other difference in their outward circumstances. Basil might have stolen as much wood as he had had given him, but how different would have been all their feelings. As it was, Basil felt that inward peace and gratitude for having been saved from a great sin, and his father and mother experienced a relief which they would perhaps scarcely have acknowledged, to think that Basil had not obeyed their orders. For certain it is that, however successful dishonesty may appear to be, however it may deceive mankind, there can be no inward peace or happiness, whatever the outward prosperity may be.

“There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

“You’re likely to have a next door neighbour soon, wife,” said Jacob. “The old cottage hard by is to be done up and re-thatched, and one of Mr. Stewart’s men is going to live there. He’s a married man, they tell me, and has several children.”

“Oh, father, suppose it should be Mr. McNicoll ! how glad I should be.”

“Is that the name of your new friend, Basil ?”

“Yes, father ; and he told me he had a son just my own age.”

“It’s just as likely to be him as not,” said Jacob ; “but I didn’t hear his name. Have you told Giles you’re going by him in the morning, wife ?”

"Yes, he has promised to wait for me by the mill-pond. Poor little Annie, I hope the change will have done her good."

"You'll be home again on Saturday."

"Oh, yes, for certain, should all be well. The carrier's cart will pass the hazel copse, Jacob, and it will be just about the time of your leaving work. If you didn't mind," added his wife, timidly, "you might look out for us, and ride home in the cart."

Jacob seemed half to guess his wife's meaning. Saturday night was the great drinking night of the week at the "Half Moon," and Mrs. Greene thought if she could only get him to ride home with her and his child, he might be induced to stay at home as he had done this evening.

"We'll see, wife, we'll see," said Jacob, good-naturedly.

CHAPTER IV.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND.

WHEN Basil awoke the next morning, he felt a little stiff in the arms from the exercise of the preceding day ; but there was a joyous feeling in his heart to which he had long been a stranger. Before he left his room he knelt down, and whilst thanking God again and again for His late mercies, besought His protection for the coming day. He was dressed long before the other members of the

family ; and, taking a can with him, started off to a farm about half a mile distant, where he spent half of his earnings of the day before in purchasing a quart of skim milk. It was a large dairy farm, and the farmer's wife used to sell the milk, after the cream had been taken off it, to the poor people of the neighbourhood.

She knew how badly off Basil and his brothers and sisters frequently were for food, and kindly gave him nearly double measure. Basil hastened home with his can full of milk, raked up the dry embers of the previous evening's wood fire, put on a few more sticks, and soon had a nice bowl of bread and milk ready for his mother's breakfast. Mrs. Greene had to leave home very early to meet the carrier's cart.

"This is kind of you, Basil," said his mother, as she sat down to her nice hot meal.

"I knew you'd be the better of something warm, mother, when you had such a long ride before you ; and I've plenty of milk left for the others, and some for father too, if he likes, for Mrs. Atkins gave me nearly two quarts for my twopence."

"You're a good boy, Basil ; and I'm sure I needn't tell you to be careful about baby till I come back ; I know you'll take good care of her. I'll just ask neighbour Allen, as I pass there presently, to look in some time to-day and see how you are getting on."

There were not many arrangements to make before leaving home. Some potatoes constituted the day's dinner, and Basil knew well how to boil them. Jacob Greene promised to bring in a loaf

for their suppers, so the simple meals were soon settled.

Basil could not go with his mother to see her off, because of the baby; but he watched her as far as he could see her, until she turned off into the lane leading to the mill-pond. Then he returned into the cottage, and gave the children their breakfasts, feeding baby carefully himself.

The little Greenes had never been taught any habits of neatness or tidiness, so nothing was further from Basil's thoughts than any attempt to clean up the cottage. The younger children played about in the dirt, as was their general custom, and Basil amused himself with nursing the baby, of whom he was very fond. The little thing went to sleep for a couple of hours in the morning, and then Basil fetched some water from the well and peeled the potatoes ready for dinner. Then, when baby woke up again, he took a small three-legged stool, and sat down at the cottage door nursing his little sister.

It was about twelve o'clock in the day, when some of the young ones who were playing on the green just beyond the cottage garden, came running up to Basil, exclaiming in loud and earnest tones, "Lady on white pony, Basil ; lady on white pony!"

Basil hurried down the garden with the baby in his arms—and there, sure enough, was a lady on a beautiful white pony, with a servant behind her on a large horse. They were riding fast across the village green in the direction of Jacob Greene's cottage. It was such an unusual sight in those quiet parts, that the children all stood in a group, staring at the approaching stranger; and it was only when they saw that the lady was really slackening

her pace, and was about to stop at their cottage, that they drew back abashed, and hid themselves behind the hedge. Basil could not hide himself, having the baby in his arms, so he remained standing where he was, and looking quite confused.

“Good morning, my little man,” said the lady, in a gentle voice, which made Basil look up at her face. She was quite a young lady, and had a pleasant countenance and long light hair. Basil thought he had never seen anyone so beautiful.

“Good morning, my little man; will you tell me whose cottage is this ?” and, dismounting from her pony as she spoke, she approached Basil.

“Father’s name is Greene, ma’am.”

“I suppose he is out at work. Is your mother at home ?”

“No, ma’am; she’s gone to West Bay, to fetch home sister Annie.”

“Will she be at home this evening ?”

“No; not till to-morrow night, ma’am.”

“And are you keeping house for her in her absence ?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I see you make a good little nurse; it is not often that boys can hold a baby so handily. Are you the eldest ?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And what is your name ?”

“Basil, ma’am.”

“Well, then, Basil,” said the lady, smiling, “will you tell your mother that Miss Hamilton has been to see her? I dare say she will scarcely remember me, for I was quite a little girl when I was obliged to leave home and go abroad for my health. It has

pleased Almighty God to make me quite well and strong, and I am now come to live at home again. My reason for calling on your mother was to inquire whether all her children attend the Sunday-school. You go there, of course ; do your little brothers also ?" added the lady, as she saw several little pairs of eyes peeping up from behind the hedge.

"I go sometimes, but not often," said Basil, colouring ; "but I mean to try and be more regular in future."

"That is right, Basil ; you know it is, after all, only leaving home an hour or so earlier."

"Mother's very poor, ma'am," said Basil, "and often I've not had clothes good enough to go in."

"Never mind your clothes, how poor they are," said Miss Hamilton ; "there's one thing you can always do, and that is, have clean hands and face, and your hair neatly combed."

Basil coloured ; for he felt that his hands and face were anything but clean just then, and that his hair was sadly tangled.

Miss Hamilton noticed his confusion, and did not further allude to that subject : perhaps she felt that his mother was more to blame than he was.

"Well, Basil, shall I see you on Sunday ? I am going to form a class of boys, which I hope to teach myself. Would you like to be in my class ?"

"Very much indeed, ma'am ;" and he stammered a little, and then said, "I will be sure and have clean hands and face then, ma'am."

"That's right, Basil ; tell your mother I will call next week, when I shall hope to find her at home ; and that I shall expect to see you on Sunday :

meanwhile, don't you think you could manage to pull up a few of these weeds?" and she pointed with her riding whip to the piece of weedy ground which ought to have been a productive garden. "This nice large piece of ground would, if properly cultivated, bring in a good stock of vegetables. It is not too late now to plant winter cabbages; and if you will have a portion of the ground weeded and dug up by the time I come next week, I will give you plenty of cabbage plants to put in it."

"I'll try," said Basil. "Father has often said he wished it was done, but he's home so late, that he hasn't time."

"But it will be an amusement for you, Basil; and I hope, some day, to give prizes for the best kept cottage gardens. Yours would not have much chance at present. But it is never too late to mend, my boy," continued the lady, kindly, as she remarked Basil's downcast look. "Can you read, Basil?"

"Pretty well, ma'am."

"I will give you this little book of pretty hymns," said Miss Hamilton, taking one out of her pocket; "and if you can learn one verse for me by Sunday, I shall be much pleased." She then read the first verse of the hymn beginning :—

"Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour,
Once became a child like me."

"Do you love your Saviour, Basil?"

"Not as much as I ought, ma'am," said Basil, with tears in his eyes.

"Few of us do that, I'm afraid," said the young

lady in a sad tone ; “ but you can pray to Him, and ask Him for His Holy Spirit. You know He has promised to give to them that ask Him ; and you know how He said, ‘ Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not.’ We will talk more about that when I see you on Sunday, Basil ; and now good-bye.” So saying, she put the little hymn book into Basil’s hand ; and, beckoning to the manservant to bring her pony, she remounted, and was out of sight in a few moments.

It seemed like a dream to Basil ; and he stood looking in the direction which the pony had taken, long after it was out of sight.

This visit seemed another special mercy to Basil. He had been half afraid lest his father and mother should object to his going to school on Sunday, and had not yet mentioned the subject to them. Now, he felt almost sure of their consent, since Miss Hamilton had been to ask them to let him go. He felt very, very happy ; and, having got little Willie to hold the baby whilst he got the potatoes ready, the children had their frugal dinner. Baby went to sleep directly afterwards, and then Basil set to work to pull up some of the weeds in the garden. His little brothers were glad to help him ; and having found the iron part of an old hoe, Basil made a rough handle for it of one of the pieces of wood he had brought home. This enabled him to get on famously ; and by the time his father came home from work, there was a great space of ground cleared, and all the weeds collected together in a heap.

“ Well done, Basil,” said his father ; “ that’s what I call doing some good.”

Basil then related all about Miss Hamilton's visit, and her promise about the cabbage plants.

"If you'll lend me your spade, father, I might dig up a little this evening."

"I guess you'd hardly be able to lift it, lad ; it's too heavy for you, Basil."

The boy looked disappointed.

"If I hadn't promised to go into the village this evening—" and Jacob Greene hesitated. "I'll tell you what I'll do, boy ; I'll give you half an hour, at all events."

Jacob set to work, and soon dug up a good piece of the ground the children had cleared. He told Basil they might set fire to the weeds they had collected. This was fine fun ; the boys called it a bonfire, and shouted and hurrahed as the smoke arose in thick columns. The fire burned longer than was expected, and by the time it had become nearly extinguished, Jacob found it would be almost too late to think of going to the village, and that he might as well make a good evening's work of it whilst he was about it. So, before he left off, the whole piece of weeded ground was well dug up ; and Basil was happy to think that the "Half Moon" would not have his father's company that night. Jacob had brought home the loaf as he had promised, and they ate the remainder of the dripping with it. "What book is that yonder ?" said he, as he caught sight of the hymn book with its bright cover.

"Miss Hamilton gave it to me, father. Shall I read some of it to you ?"

Jacob Greene had never been much of a scholar, and of late years had neglected what little he ever

did know. He felt rather proud, though, to think his son could read, and told him he should like to hear some of his new book.

Basil had been studying the hymn Miss Hamilton had marked for him, and was therefore able to read it quite fluently from beginning to end.

" You're quite a scholar, Basil, and I've no doubt you'll be a better man than I am, some of these days. I never took much to learning when a boy, or I might have been very different now. I think I must try and let you go to school regularly for a bit, if your mother can spare you."

" Oh, father, how good !"

" Nay, nay, Basil; it's nothing but what I ought to do. Somehow it seems to me sometimes as if I had not done all I should for you all. I've been thinking all about what your good friend, the woodman yonder, told you yesterday ; and I must say I should not be sorry to hear he was coming to be our neighbour ; he might do us all good. There's your mother now—but, come, I won't say nothing against her ; may be if I'd been a different husband she'd have been a different wife, and you'd have had a better home."

" Father, Miss Hamilton told me it was never too late to mend."

" May be so, Basil ; but the longer you put it off the harder it is to do."

" God will help you, father, if you ask Him."

" So they say," said Jacob, in a doubting tone.

" I know He will, for He answered me yesterday," cried Basil, earnestly. " I prayed to Him in the stubble field over against the wood, and begged Him to help me ; and He sent me my good new

friend, the woodman, to give me some work, and to keep me from stealing ; and oh, father, if you would only pray to God to keep you from — ”

Basil coloured and hesitated ; he had never before had the courage to say so much to his father, and he felt half afraid to go on.

“ I know what you mean, lad ; you mean to keep me from spending my time and money at the ‘ Half Moon.’ I know it’s wrong, Basil, as well as you can tell me. I know that if I had done different your home would have been different. I have earned enough to keep you all tidy and to bring you up respectably ; but when once drink gets hold of a man, Basil, he’s a ruined man for ever, and he drags down his family to ruin with him.”

“ Will you try once more, father ?”

“ We’ll see, boy, we’ll see.”

This was Jacob Greene’s favourite saying, and it is a very dangerous one. The habit of procrastination, or putting off the performance of any known duty, is a sort of madness. A heathen poet tells us to “ dare to be wise,” and to “ begin at once ”; and a celebrated English divine says that “ to be always intending to live a new life, but never to find time to set about it, is as if a man should put off eating and drinking from one day to another, till he is starved and destroyed.”

Jacob did not allude to the subject any more that evening, but he stayed at home, and nursed the baby when it was too dark to work in the garden, and Basil felt hopeful as to the future ; whilst he did not forget to say his prayers before getting into bed, and to thank Almighty God for all His goodness to him that day.

Jacob Greene's work lay nearly four miles off, so he was not able to do anything more to the garden before leaving home the next morning ; but he called out to Basil as he was going out, and told him that if he and the little ones would clear away the weeds in the other part of the garden during the day, he would, may be, dig a bit more in the evening.

"All right, father, we'll get the weeds up, never fear ; and don't forget mother's coming home to-night with dear little Annie, father."

"I'll remember, Basil, and may be I'll come home with them, as your mother asked me."

The one half of the garden looked so different to the other, that when Basil saw it that morning he wondered how he could have allowed the weeds to have remained so long. But it is most true that use makes us familiar with bad habits and vices, and that by indulging in them, we not only cease to condemn them, but, by degrees, learn to look at them with complacency if not with pleasure. How needful, then, to pray for grace to shun the very first beginning of evil.

The children worked hard that day. Baby was very good, and Willie and Bobby amused her a great deal, leaving Basil leisure to weed the garden. They had nearly finished it by dinner time, and then Basil could not help being struck with the look of the path leading up to the cottage. It too was full of weeds, but whilst the garden was so likewise, it had passed unnoticed. Now it looked so bad that Basil determined to weed that also. He found an old knife, which helped him to get up the weeds which were more tightly rooted in the walk

than in the other part. When the walk was weeded, it looked sadly as if it wanted sweeping, but Basil had no broom. Necessity has been called the mother of invention ; he had never before felt the want of a broom, and now that he did, he remembered having seen some gipsies on the common making brooms of the branches of the heath, which grew plentifully all around the cottage. These boughs of heath were tied firmly on to the end of a long stick, and made excellent brooms. Basil sent Willie to gather a good bundle of heather —he would have liked to go himself, knowing he could get it quicker than Willie would ; but he had promised his mother not to leave the baby, and he kept his word. Willie was not long, however, and when he came back Basil made a handle for the broom of one of the largest pieces of his wood, and tied the heather on firmly with some string. How proud Basil felt when he had swept the path with a broom of his own making. Bobby was going to litter it all over with leaves and pebbles directly afterwards. Poor little fellow ! he had never been taught to be neat and tidy ; but Basil asked him not to do it, in a kind and gentle manner, not at all angrily, and Bobby did as he was bid at once.

“I want mother to see the pretty clean path when she comes home, Bobby,” said Basil.

The path looked so nice that Basil could scarcely keep from admiring it. Somehow or other the clean path made him think of clean hands, and of what Miss Hamilton said about everybody being able to have clean hands and face if they could not always get good clothes. Basil got a bowl of water and

washed his hands and face, and then he thought baby's looked dirtier than ever, so he washed hers also, though baby kicked and cried a good deal at so unusual a proceeding. Then he made Willie and Bobby and little Frank wash their hands and faces, and I can assure you there was as much improvement in the appearance of the children as there was in the garden path.

By that time it was getting very near the hour when they might expect their mother to be coming home, and Basil thought they would have time just to go as far as the mill-pond and meet the carrier's cart. So he carefully locked the door of the cottage, put the key in a little hole under the thatch, and taking baby in his arms, set out, followed by his three little brothers.

When they got to the mill-pond the carrier had not yet arrived, so the children stood watching the great wheel going round, splash, splash in the water; and Bobby asked Basil what it went round so for, and Basil told him that it turned a mill which ground wheat into flour. Then they saw some of the miller's men come out of the house, and they looked quite white with the flour, and the little ones laughed to see them.

"There's old Giles coming along ; I can hear him talking to his horse, and I can hear the bells ringing too. I wonder if father will be there."

The carrier's cart had a tilt to it to keep out the rain, and there were three bells on the horse's neck, which jingled pleasantly as he went along.

Soon the cart was in sight jogging along at a leisurely pace ; and now Basil strained his eyes to see who was in it.

Mrs. Greene was the first to recognize the group at the mill-pond, and waved a handkerchief to them.

"That's mother's handkerchief," said Willie ; "and there's mother herself sitting by Giles, and there's little Annie on her lap, and there's—I don't see any one else, Basil."

But Basil did. He saw the sleeve of his father's working jacket showing just above his mother's shoulder. "Let's give a good hurrah, Willie," said he.

The children shouted with all their might.

Then the cart stopped, and the carrier helped Mrs. Greene down, and then lifted out little Annie; and lastly Jacob himself got out with his tools.

"Dear Annie," cried Basil, as he kissed her, "how much better you look."

"She can walk a little now, Basil," said her mother.

"But she mustn't walk home though," said Jacob, kindly, lifting her in his arms.

Then they walked homewards, and Annie kept talking to Basil over her father's shoulder.

Basil was all anxiety to see what his mother would say to the garden. Mrs. Greene could scarcely believe her eyes.

"I'd better go away again," she said, smiling, "since you have done so much whilst I was gone."

"Why, Basil, the garden path looks just as nice as Aunt Mary's," said Annie.

"Well done, boy," said his father ; "now I must keep my promise ;" and Jacob Greene did not go near the "Half Moon" that evening.

Mrs. Greene's sister had given her a nice home-

made loaf and some eggs, and part of the half-crown had been expended on an ounce of tea and a little sugar ; so the family sat down to a comfortable meal, and Jacob finished digging the other half of the garden before he went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

A BLESSED CHANGE.

LITTLE Annie's visit to West Bay was made, through God's blessing, the means of doing good to others besides herself. Mrs. Greene's sister, who had so kindly taken charge of the lame child for a month, was a truly pious woman, and was married to a very respectable man, who was also a sincere Christian. Mrs. Morris—for that was her name—had not seen her sister before for many years. She had a large family of her own to look after, and seldom left her home. Happening, however, to hear of Annie's lameness, she wrote, with her husband's consent, to her sister, saying she should be happy to take care of the little girl for a month, and give her the advantage of sea bathing. So Annie had been sent to West Bay under the charge of the carrier, and Mrs. Greene had not seen her sister until she went to fetch her child home, and to thank the Morrises for all their kindness to her. She found there a very different home to the one she had left. It was not that Morris earned much more than

Jacob did ; but whereas the latter spent at least half his gains at the public-house, Frank Morris, on the contrary, never entered one. His cottage was a pattern of neatness and order ; his garden was the admiration of the neighbourhood, and he frequently gained prizes for his fruit and vegetables at the cottager's show which took place annually at West Bay.

Frank and his wife had seven children, whilst the Greenes had only five ; but there could not possibly be a greater contrast than there was in the appearance of the two families. The young Morrises were always neatly and comfortably dressed, and were taught to take care of their clothes. Mrs. Morris herself was a pattern of neatness in her dress, never having anything approaching to finery, but always looking tidy and respectable. Five out of the seven children went to school, the two elder only to an evening one, as they were already beginning to earn something towards their support. They were both boys. One assisted his father, who was a journeyman carpenter, and the other worked for a miller in the town. The third child was a girl, and was quite her mother's right hand. People used to say, " You are a lucky woman, Mrs. Morris, to have such a girl as your Lucy ;" but whenever Frank heard such remarks, he always said, " It's her mother who has made her what she is."

Their cottage was neatly furnished, everything very plain and very good ; and to poor little Annie, who had been used to her dreary home, it seemed like going into a palace. Her aunt was surprised to see how poorly the child was dressed, and soon discovered the way in which she had been accustomed

to live. The child was very teachable, and very soon got into her cousin's tidy ways ; and Mrs. Morris made her a set of neat clothes out of some of her own children's things.

She was most anxious her sister should come and fetch Annie home, in order that she might have a little conversation with her about her family. She wrote, therefore, begging her to come, if only for one night; and that was how Mrs. Greene came to go to West Bay.

There was, if possible, a greater contrast between the appearance of the sisters themselves than between their children. Mrs. Morris, although several years older than Mrs. Greene, looked five or six years younger, and had such a sunny, happy expression of countenance that it did one good to look at her. We have before described poor Mrs. Greene's careworn and untidy appearance.

"Well," said Annie's mother, as she sat by the fire enjoying a good cup of tea on the evening of her arrival at West Bay, "I'm sure I cannot think how you have contrived to get all these comforts about you, Mary : why, we've hardly got a stick at home that's worth anything, and as to buying clothes for the children," she added, as she looked at her nephews' comfortable pinafores and good boots, "why it's more than I can do to find food for them, much less clothe them. But there's one thing," said she, sadly, "and that is, I suppose Frank is a steady man—I only wish Jacob was."

"Frank not only never enters a public-house," said Mrs. Morris, "but we have both joined the Temperance Society. It is now more than three years since either of us took a drop of beer ; we are

both better in health since we left it off, and we reckon we have saved nearly twenty pounds ! And it was setting such a bad example to the young ones. Of course, as they grow up they want to do what their parents do ; and Frank said he should never have forgiven himself if he had led the way to his son's frequenting the alehouse."

" You're very fortunate in having such a husband, that's all I can say," sighed Mrs. Greene.

" But don't you think it may be partly your own fault that Jacob is unsteady ? " suggested her sister. " It is unreasonable to expect a man to be sober and keep to his home if that home is not made comfortable for him. I have frequently felt very tired, after a hard day's washing for instance, and more inclined to lie down and rest myself than to tidy up the place ; but then I have thought that many and many a man has been driven to the public-house by not having a clean hearth and a cheerful fire to sit by when he comes home tired ; so I have bestirred myself, and got all straight and comfortable for him, and I have had my reward," continued she, " for a better and a kinder husband never lived."

" I may have been in the wrong, Mary," said her sister, honestly, " and I believe now I have been ; for when I was first married I was very giddy, and fond of visiting about amongst the neighbours ; and it was then that Jacob took to drinking so."

" Yes, dear," said Mrs. Morris, kindly ; " and then instead of making a great effort and praying to God to help you to reclaim your husband, you let bad go on to worse, and then everything went wrong. Why, I remember when you were one of

the smartest, healthiest looking girls in the place, Jane, and now——”

“I know it all,” said Mrs. Greene, with tears in her eyes; “I know and see now the difference there is between us, Mary; and if I had my life to go over again, I might perhaps do better; as it is——”

“My sister, it is never too late to mend,” said Mary Morris, in an encouraging tone.

“Begin at once when you go home; try and keep yourself neat and clean. However poor one’s clothes are, they can be kept mended and clean; and, as my good mistress used to say to me before I was married, ‘Always let your husband see you neat and tidy, Mary: it is a poor compliment to a man to let him see that you take no trouble about your appearance.’ There is a wide difference between being fond of dress, and being anxious to appear neat and respectable.”

When Frank and his two sons came home from work, they all three went up-stairs and washed their hands and faces before they sat down to tea; and when the meal was finished, those children who had lessons to prepare did so, whilst the little ones sat on their father’s knee.

The two sisters had a long talk over old times, and Mrs. Morris took every opportunity of giving her friendly advice, whilst Frank occasionally put in a word of encouragement.

“I don’t know what I mightn’t have been, Mrs. Greene, had not God given me so good a helpmate. Most truly does the Bible say, ‘Her value is far above rubies.’”

The family retired to rest very early, but previous

to so doing, Frank read a chapter out of his mother's great family Bible, and then offered up a simple prayer. The little ones had each said a short prayer before going to bed.

"Does Jacob read to you in the evening?" asked Mary of her sister, as she was showing her into her neat bedroom.

"No, no," said Mrs. Greene, with tears in her eyes, "but it has been as much my fault as his."

"If we neglect to ask for God's blessing, how can we expect to prosper?" said Mrs. Morris, gravely. "Oh, my dear sister, be warned in time; think that it is not only your own and your husband's souls which are in peril, but those young souls entrusted to you by God. How can your children do well when you do not train them in the fear of God?"

Mrs. Greene promised to do her best to mend matters, and to endeavour to win her husband back from his unsteady ways; and before leaving West Bay in the morning, which she had to do very early, as it was a long journey to her home, her sister gave her one of her good cotton dresses, which, as the sisters were nearly of a size, would be sure to fit her, and also a nice warm shawl. We have already said that little Annie was likewise neatly dressed by her kind aunt.

Mrs. Morris saw her sister off by the carrier, and Frank put into her hands at parting the basket with the home-made bread and fresh eggs which we have already mentioned.

Mrs. Greene's house had never appeared so wretched to her as it did when coming direct from

her sister's comfortable cottage. She availed herself of Basil's broom to sweep up the kitchen ; and when her husband came in from his digging, the place certainly did look somewhat tidier than usual. Jacob was also in a much better humour than usual. He gave his wife five shillings ; and Basil was despatched to the shop in the village to purchase a small bit of bacon and a few necessaries. The little ones were in bed, and Basil gone to the shop ; and the husband and wife sat alone by their, for once, clean hearth.

"Annie seems much better, wife," said Jacob ; "I'm sure we have reason to be much obliged to your sister and her husband."

"She is very much better ; and the doctor at West Bay, to whom Mary took her, said that he thought she might in time get quite well ; but that she must have nourishing food."

"We must get her some milk regularly from the farm."

"I should like to do so, Jacob, I'm sure ; but I fear we can't afford it."

"We'll try, wife, we'll try," said her husband, kindly.

"And I will try, with God's blessing, to be a better wife than I have been," sobbed Mrs. Greene. "I've very much to answer for, Jacob, I know," she continued ; "I never tried to make your home comfortable for you, as Mary has done for Frank ; and what is the consequence ?"

"We have both of us been to blame, Jane ; and we must thank God that we are brought to see it ere it be too late. I might have been very differently circumstanced had I been steadier. I have thought

much about it the last few days ; and I don't see but what it mayn't be yet time to pull up a bit. It will be God alone who enables me to do it ; for when once drink has got hold of a man—oh, wife, wife ! what a lesson couldn't I read to any young man just beginning life ? Once give way to hard drink, and you put yourself in the power of an enemy who will never let you go—never, wife, never!"

"Don't say so, Jacob, don't say so : Mary was saying last night it's never too late to mend."

"That's what Miss Hamilton was saying to our boy yesterday, wife. We'll let Basil go to school to-morrow, and may be we'll be able to send him a little on week days for a bit. I think the lad would soon be quite a scholar like ; and it's a pity to keep him back when it seems to come so natural to him."

Mrs. Greene then told her husband all about her little nephews ; what good boys they were, and how greatly they helped their parents.

"And Basil would be like them, wife, if we had taken the same pains with him. I never seemed to feel the harm we were doing him until the other day, when he brought home that bundle of wood. It seemed such a relief to find he had not stolen it."

"That's just how I felt," said Mrs. Greene ; "and I'm sure God must have put it into my heart to do so, for I never felt so before. I remember an old mistress of mine once used to talk of the 'finger of Providence.' I'm sure it has been pointing to us the last few days, Jacob. First there was Basil being kept from stealing that wood ; then my

seeing Mary's home—so different from what ours is—and then Miss Hamilton coming to ask us to let the children go to the school: it seems just as if God was calling us in all manner of ways."

"And it will be our faults if we don't listen, wife."

When Basil came home with his basket full of purchases, he found his father and mother sitting cosily by the fire, and looking happier than he had ever seen them before.

"They told me down at the shop, father, that Mr. Stewart was going to hire a dozen boys on Monday next to work on his farm, and that I must be early at Woodside if I wished to be one of them."

"You'll be able to be there as early as any, Basil," said his mother; "and, thank God, you can go with a clear conscience."

"Yes, mother; and if I can only see my good friend the woodman, he will give me a good word, I know."

"And you'll go to the Sunday-school to-morrow, Basil."

"Oh, yes," said the boy, as he wished his parents good-night, and went to bed with a light and grateful heart. Jacob and his wife sat talking long after the fire had gone out. The spell seemed broken that had so long estranged them from each other; and once having made up their minds, through God's grace, to endeavour to live new lives, they seemed as if they could never have done talking about it.

"I think even the little change to West Bay has

done you good, wife ; you look quite as you used to do to-night."

"The change is in our hearts, Jacob, and let us bless God for it," said Mrs. Greene, as she pressed her husband's hand.

CHAPTER VI.

A SABBATH WELL SPENT.

BASIL was up very early the next morning, and had lighted the fire before his mother, who was rather tired from the effects of her journey, came down-stairs. She had been working, too, rather late the night before, and had patched up Basil's clothes after he had gone to bed, in order that he might look a little decent to go to the Sunday-school. Her sister had put into the bundle a pair of boots which her second boy had outgrown, and they just happened to fit Basil as if they had been made for him ; so that when his hands and face were well washed, and his hair well brushed, he looked quite a tidy, respectable boy.

"Basil don't look as nice as cousins do when they go to school," said little Annie ; "they have always nice clean pinafores on, and a black bag to carry their books in."

"I hope Basil will have a pinafore by next Sunday," said his mother.

"I wish I could go to school too, mother."

" You're not strong enough to walk so far yet a while, Annie."

" Aunt Mary has a pretty little cart all painted green, and Cousin Frank draws Nellie to school in it," said Annie, rather discontentedly.

" Your aunt and cousins have many things that we have not," replied her mother : " may be we shall be better off some day, Annie ; but you mustn't begin to grumble now you're come home."

" I won't, mother, I won't indeed," cried the little girl ; " and I will try not to be thinking about what my cousins have."

" Some day we'll see if we can't make you a little green cart to go to school in, Annie," said her father, who had been listening to the conversation.

" Oh, father !" and the little rainbow face looked up with a bright, happy smile.

" And if you'd like to go to church this morning, wife," continued he, " I will look after the young 'uns."

" I think I'd rather wait till next Sunday, Jacob, thank you all the same ; but you will go, won't you ?" added she, persuasively.

" I'm afraid I'm hardly decent enough," said Jacob, looking down at his clothes, which were certainly anything but clean.

" You shan't be another Sunday with such dirty things," said his wife ; " it's all my fault, Jacob."

" But Miss Hamilton said, father, that our shabby clothes did not so much matter as long as our hands and face were clean."

" I'll go," said Jacob, with a determined voice. " God knows I've done many things lately I had

more reason to be ashamed of than going to God's house in shabby clothes. I'll go, wife."

Basil set off to school with a light heart.

" When all Thy mercies, O my God,
 My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view I'm lost
 In wonder, love, and praise."

Basil had never heard that beautiful hymn, but the thoughts expressed in it passed through his mind as he walked along through the pleasant lanes on that bright and peaceful Sabbath.

He was almost afraid he should be late, and was glad when he had ascended a hilly part of the road, from whence the school-house was visible, to see a number of children going towards it from different directions. Then he knew he was in good time.

Beechgrove, the name of the house where Mr. Hamilton lived, was situated on the hillside very near the church and school-house; and as Basil passed the lodge-gate, he saw a young lady walking on a short distance before him who he fancied might be Miss Hamilton, although she looked very different in a bonnet to what she had done in her riding dress. He was quite right in his conjecture, for when he entered the school-room she had just taken her seat. She welcomed Basil with a kind smile.

"I'm very glad to see you, Basil," she said, pointing to a seat on a form close by her.

Mr. Norton, the clergyman, also spoke a few kind words to Basil, and said he hoped he would now be more regular in his attendance.

"I hope so, sir," said Basil ; "I will try to be so."

Miss Hamilton had not more than six or seven boys in her class ; but she hoped to have a larger number by the following Sunday. She had given them all the same hymn to learn for her, and was pleased to find that Basil had learned two verses quite perfectly. She gave him a neat Bible, and told him she would bring him a piece of stuff when she came to his cottage in the week, for his mother to make him a bag in which to keep his books.

"I shall expect to see them kept quite clean, Basil, and free from dogs' ears," she said.

She then read to the boys the eighth chapter of St. Matthew, and dwelt particularly upon that portion of it commencing at the twenty-third verse, where a great storm at sea is described, and where the disciples awoke our Saviour, saying, "Save, Lord ; we perish ;" and then she pointed out the loving-kindness and gentleness of Jesus Christ, who, instead of being angry with His disciples' want of faith, listened to their prayer, and calmed the raging of the tempest. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith ?" He said to them, more in sorrow than in anger. "Just so," continued Miss Hamilton : "like as a father pitith his children, so the Lord will look with pity on our weakness, and help us in all our dangers. To be acquainted with our own weakness, to distrust our own power of standing upright, is one great help in the right way ; for when we feel ourselves so very weak, what does it naturally make us inclined to do ?"

"To pray to God to make us strong, ma'am," said

Basil, as the events of the past week came into his mind.

"Quite right, Basil ; and what assurance have we that God will hear us when we call upon Him ? Can any boy give me a text ?"

"Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," said little Robert Allen, a boy of ten years.

"Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee," said another.

"Will God always answer our prayers, ma'am ?" asked Basil.

"That will depend very much on whether we ask such things as please Him, or such things as will be good for us to have granted. You boys might ask your parents for many things which they might know would not be proper or good for you to have, and they would consequently refuse your request. We ought to feel that God will always answer our petitions when it is good for us."

"Is it right to pray to be rich?" asked Basil.

"I don't think it is right to wish very much to be rich," answered Miss Hamilton ; "and therefore, I don't think it would be right to pray for it. I once read that it would be a good way to prove whether our wishes were right or wrong, to think whether they would bear to be turned into prayers—I mean that we should then find that we ought not to desire very much what we dare not pray for. You know the wise man says, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches.' God could have made you rich if it had been good for you. I think one of our prayers to

God ought to be similar to the petition the apostles made to our Lord upon earth—‘Lord, teach us to pray.’”

“And then we should be sure to pray right if God taught us, shouldn’t we, ma’am?” said Robert.

“Yes, Robert. Can any one give me an example of a prayer that pleased God?”

“Was it Solomon’s prayer, ma’am?”

“It was : when Solomon became king he prayed to God for wisdom to rule his kingdom rightly ; and God heard his prayer, and said to him, ‘Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast *not* asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself. . . . Lo, I have done according to thy words ; I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart ; and I have also given thee what thou hast not asked, both riches and honour.’ I think we may learn from this example, Basil, what sort of petitions pleases God. We have great need to pray to Him to make us ask such things as please Him, and if we are accustomed to ask His blessing upon all we do, it will help us never wilfully to do a wrong thing ; it will help us to think whether what we are about to do is right or wrong ; and so help us both to pray and to act according to the will of God.”

The time passed away so quickly that Basil was surprised and sorry when he was told to prepare for going to Divine worship.

“You may walk down with me boys, if you like,” said Miss Hamilton ; and they gladly availed themselves of the permission. “I should like you all to think during the week of what you have heard at

school on Sunday," said their kind teacher: "next week, for example, let each boy recollect those lines in his hymn :

' Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour,
Once became a child like me.'

Let it ever be before your mind, at work or at play, that the Lord of heaven and earth condescended for your sakes to take upon Him the form of a little child ; and whilst that thought fills us with love and gratitude, let it also encourage you to go to Him in all your difficulties and trials, seeing that 'we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'"

Basil sat by his father during the service, and when it was over they had a pleasant walk home together, and Basil repeated a good deal of what he had been taught at school.

"I'm so glad Miss Hamilton has a class, father ; I like her so much better than my former teacher. She is so kind and good."

"I shouldn't have known her again," said his father ; "she was but a slip of a girl when she left home for foreign parts, most folks said only to die ; but God had some work for her to do for Him it seems."

That afternoon Basil read a chapter to his father and mother out of his new Bible, and Mrs. Greene suggested to her husband that they should begin to read a portion every evening ; "for," continued she, "how can we expect God to take care of us and

bless us if we neglect His word, and never pray to Him."

"I'm no great scholar, wife ; but I'll do my best," said Jacob.

CHAPTER VII.

A PLEASANT ENDING.

KI N a pleasant morning room at Woodside Farm, Mr. and Mrs. Stewart sat at breakfast, the day following that on which the events occurred related in the last chapter.

"Give me another cup of coffee, Kate ; and then I must be off. I expect a number of boys from the village to see me this morning. I have heard sad accounts of the manner in which many of the peasantry about here live ; they say a clean tidy cottage is quite a strange sight, and that scarcely one person out of ten ever enters a place of worship."

"I think the fault must lie a great deal with the resident proprietors, Edward."

"You see, Kate, it has been much against the poor people, that this large estate has been so long unoccupied. Mr. Hamilton, too, has been an unavoidable absentee through his daughter's delicate health, which has obliged him to live so much abroad. I think matters will improve now. In my humble way, I hope, with God's blessing, to remedy as much of the evil as lies in my power."

“And how do you propose setting about it?”

“In this way : I intend paying my boys less wages, and taking them into the house, where they will acquire habits of order and industry, and be constantly under my own eye. I intend also, if possible, to devote an hour in the evening to giving them a little instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. By taking boys into the house I, of course, put a stop to their attending any school ; and I think it my duty not to allow them to grow up in ignorance.”

“Quite right, Edward ; and I suppose that if I, at some future time, should see my way clear to taking two or three girls into the house for a few months each at a time, to be trained in household duties, I have your consent to make the experiment.”

“Most heartily ; I am delighted to find you contemplating such a plan ; for, after all, it is perfectly useless to expect much improvement in the cottages of the peasantry, whilst future mistresses of cottages are being brought up as they are here. It will be striking at the root of the evil to get the children away from such houses for a time. When they return, they will, to a certain extent, carry with them the habits of order and industry which they have acquired elsewhere ; and in the meantime we must do all in our power, by kind and conciliatory advice, to get the mothers to improve the condition of their homes.”

“If you please, sir,” said a servant, entering the room, “there are more than twenty boys waiting to see you.”



THE DISAPPOINTMENT,

"I'll come directly," said Mr. Stewart; "and I shall be glad if you will come with me, Kate, and assist me in my selection."

A strange and motley group was assembled before the hall door. Upwards of twenty boys of all sizes, from the little curly-headed urchin of seven or eight, to the tall overgrown lad of fourteen or fifteen. Their costume was decidedly more picturesque than tidy; and many bare knees and elbows peeped through ragged trousers and jackets.

"Well, my lads," said Mr. Stewart, with a good-humoured smile, "I am glad to see you all, and to find so many of you anxious to obtain employment. I cannot, however, promise to engage you *all*, but I must try and choose those who I think will be most useful to me. He then put several questions to the boys, and finished by selecting six of the bigger ones, telling the others that they were still young enough to be able to afford to wait a little, and that he would take down their names, and would remember them the next opportunity. Mr. Stewart then commenced making a list of the names of those boys he could not at present engage.

"What is your name, my boy?" "Tom Hill, sir." "And yours?" "William Allen." "And yours?" "Fred Brown." "And yours?" but as Mr. Stewart put the question, the boy thus addressed burst into tears, and sobbed out, "Basil Greene, sir."

"And why do you cry so, my poor boy?" said Mr. Stewart.

Basil still sobbed on, and could not articulate a word.

Mr. Stewart looked at the boy, and could not

help thinking he had seen him somewhere before, but where he could not recollect.

“ Did you ever see me before, Basil ? ”

“ Yes ; please, sir, I held your horse the other day.”

“ Ah, now I remember ; but tell me, Basil, what makes you so unhappy ? ”

“ Because, sir, I wanted to—begin to try and be industrious, so that I might become independent like Squire Hamilton, sir, and help father, and mother, and Annie, sir ; and if I have nothing to do, I can’t be industrious ; and—I’m very nearly thirteen, sir, though I ain’t very big ; and —”

At this moment a kind, good-natured looking man came to the hall door to speak to Mr. Stewart.

“ Here’s one of the village lads in sad trouble, Donald, because I cannot find room for him, too, on the farm. He is much older than I thought he was ; and if you think you can manage seven boys instead of six, why I don’t mind giving him a trial. He don’t seem very strong, I must say.”

Long before Mr. Stewart had finished speaking, a smile of recognition had passed between Donald and Basil, and the face of the latter brightened wonderfully, in the hope that the good woodman would again stand his friend.

“ I know something of the lad, sir,” said Donald ; “ he worked with me for a day last week up in the woods yonder, and as far as I can see, I think he will make up in good will for what he wants in strength. He won’t be badly off for strength neither, when he gets a little regular feeding.”

So Basil was entered as one of the boys on Wood-side Farm ; and Mrs. Stewart, having inquired of

him who "Annie" was, of whom he had spoken when he was crying, and learning that the child was delicate, sent her some milk and eggs by Basil, and promised to call and see her in a few days.

Basil and his companions were not to commence their farm duties until the middle of the week, as the rooms were not quite ready which Mr. Stewart was having fitted up for them to sleep in; and Basil was not sorry to have a few more days to spend at home.

Annie and Willie were standing by the garden hedge as Basil came bounding across the green.

"Mother, mother," they cried out, "I know it's all right with Basil, by the way he's running."

There was great joy in the cottage when the good news was told. Things were certainly getting brighter and brighter.

"How pleased father will be, won't he, mother?"

"Yes, Basil," replied Mrs. Greene; "I hope and pray he will come home again in good time this evening, that's all."

In the course of the morning, Basil, who was in the garden, saw his good friend Donald McNicoll coming across the green, and proceeding in the direction of the cottage near to that in which the Greenes lived, and which was about to be re-thatched. "It's all true, mother," cried Basil. "Mr. McNicoll is coming to be our neighbour; surely I am right glad, that's all." And so saying, he rushed out to meet his friend, and to thank him for the service he had rendered him that morning.

"All right, laddie, all right," cried the kind-hearted Donald; "I'm glad I was there just then, certainly. Some people would call it a 'lucky

chance,' but there's no such thing as chance, Basil, believe me ; this is no chance world in which we live. Thank God for it in your prayers to-night, boy."

Donald took Basil over the cottage, and told him what improvements were going to be made in it.

"When it is all finished, I shall send for the wife and bairns, Basil ; you and young Donald will be great friends, I think."

Donald McNicoll was right ; there was no such thing as chance. Job says, speaking of the Almighty, "Doth He not see my ways, and count all my steps?" And David says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." And again, "Thou art about my bed and about my path, and spiest out all my ways." It was not chance that had led Basil to pray that he might be kept from stealing. It was not chance that brought him to the spot where Donald was working. It was not by chance that Jacob and his wife were led to repent of having told Basil to steal the wood ; and it was not chance that led Mrs. Greene to visit her sister at West Bay. Lastly, it was not chance that had, just at this particular time, caused Jacob to find work in an opposite direction from the "Half Moon." Jacob could not go to the "Half Moon" without first passing his cottage, and leaving all his tools there. We do not mean to say that he intended going to the alehouse on this Monday evening, but the chains of long-indulged vices are very strong ; and human nature, when left to itself, is very weak, and there is no saying whether Jacob would have resisted the temptation had the alehouse

been on his road as he returned from work. As it was, he went home, just as a matter of course with his tools, and as he neared his cottage he heard a woman's voice singing quite cheerfully. It was years since such a sound had issued from his home, and somehow it recalled his early married life ; and with softened feelings he entered the cottage. Mrs. Greene was dressed in the neat print dress her sister had given her ; the cottage floor was well swept (thanks to Basil's broom) ; the children's hands and faces were clean, and the baby, looking neater than ever it had been known to do before, sat crowing on her mother's lap. A small but bright fire burnt cheerfully on the hearth, the round deal table had been washed, and on it were arranged the tea things (a cracked and broken assemblage, truly), but quite clean at all events. Who could have found it in his heart to leave home again under such a new and pleasing aspect of affairs ? Not Jacob Greene. He praised his wife's looks ; again repeated that he was sure her visit to West Bay had done her good, played with the children, gave his wife half-a-crown, and when he had done his tea, expressed his intention of paying a visit to a neighbouring wheelwright to get some pieces of wood to make a gate to the garden.

The wheelwright was a kind-hearted man, who had long regretted the state of matters at Jacob Greene's, and he was so pleased at this sign of improvement evinced by a gate being thought necessary for the garden, that he would take no money for the wood, but declared to Jacob that he never gave anything away with more pleasure in his

life. Some strong nails, a pair of old hinges, and the loan of a few tools, were added, and in the course of a couple of hours a neat looking gate was completed, for Jacob was a handy man, and could, when sober, turn his hand to many things.

He kept his promise, also, of reading a chapter in the Bible to his wife and children ; and poor Mrs. Greene could scarcely restrain her tears of joy and thankfulness at her husband's altered conduct.

When Miss Hamilton called again at the cottage she was much pleased with the improved appearance of everything, and kindly and affectionately encouraged Mrs. Greene to persevere. "God has been very good to you, Mrs. Greene," she said, "and I need not urge upon you the necessity of not growing weary in well-doing. You must not expect that things will always go smoothly ; it is probable, though I pray it may not happen, that your husband may, occasionally, be tempted to go back to his old ways ; but if you pray to God to enable you to persevere in your present course, you will not have, as formerly, the additional pain of feeling that your husband's sin lay greatly at your own door."

Miss Hamilton was delighted to find that Basil had been engaged at Woodside Farm, and also to hear that he would still have his Sundays at home, and be able to continue his attendance at the school. She told him to come to her house that evening, and she would order the gardener to give him the cabbage plants she had promised him.

Basil went as desired, and found a basket of plants ready for him. There were several kinds of winter kale and cabbage plants, and the gardener

told Basil his young mistress had told him to put by a few gooseberry and currant trees for Basil, when the time for removing such plants should come.

We might write a great deal more about Basil and his family, but it would make too long a story. It must be sufficient to say that Basil was enabled, by God's grace, to prove a useful and faithful servant to Mr. Stewart, who, in return, showed himself a kind friend and adviser both to Basil and his family; that Jacob Greene was persuaded by his brother-in-law, Frank Morris, who came over one day from West Bay, to give up going to the "Half Moon," and that he has never regretted the step he then took. You would not recognize the cottage were you to see it. All is so neat and comfortable.

Donald McNicoll's family set an excellent example to the little Greenes, and Mrs. McNicoll, a kind and motherly woman, is like an elder sister to Basil's mother.

Thus, then, we will leave them, happy in each other, and never ceasing to thank God for His great mercies toward them all.

THE END.

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